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DE RUEHMR #0276 1311021
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R 111021Z MAY 07
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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2950
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0044
RUEHMR/AMEMBASSY MASERU 3314

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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT ALSO FOR AF/S

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: TBIO AORC PREL KFLU WHO LT

SUBJECT: LESOTHO SUPPORTS U.S. ON SMALLPOX, FLU ISSUES

REF: STATE 61739

¶1. (U) On May 10, Poloff delivered reftel demarche to Lesotho's Principal Secretary for the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, T.J. Ramotsoari, who pledged support for U.S. positions at the 2007 World Health Assembly (WHA) in Geneva, Switzerland. He stated that Minister of Health Ramatlepeng has already arrived in Geneva, and he would depart for Switzerland several hours after our meeting. Reftel points were also delivered to Acting Principal Secretary of Foreign Affairs Makosholo, who stated without additional comment that he would relay points to his superiors.

Flu Viruses: Will Support U.S. Position

¶12. (SBU) Principal Secretary Ramotsoari thanked Poloff for information regarding the need to maintain the current system of universal provision of flu samples to the WHO. He stated that he was certain Lesotho would support the U.S. position in this matter. He also pointed out that Lesotho, as current chair of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), would have influence over the Assembly (WHA) votes of other member states. He noted that SADC health ministers would gather on the margins of the World Health Assembly meeting and forge common positions on issues.

Smallpox: Keep It, But Give Us Access

¶13. (SBU) Ramotsoari noted that the debate over the maintenance or destruction of official smallpox virus samples has arisen repeatedly at past WHA events. He stated that Lesotho's position remains that the smallpox virus should not be destroyed, but that scientists and students from less developed countries should also have access to the virus samples for research and academic purposes. He agreed that it would be foolish to assume that the two legal stores of the virus are the only remaining samples in existence.

Lesotho Support. SADC Unity?

¶14. (SBU) COMMENT: Lesotho's stated support for U.S. positions on these two issues is encouraging. Even more interesting, however, is the statement that SADC member states would reach common positions on these issues. If this does come to pass, it would be a noteworthy development. END COMMENT.

PERRY